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ABSTRACT

The second of three booklets in a series intended for parents of handicapped children, the booklet considers ways in which parents can develop socialization skills in their children. Developmental milestones are charted for the period from birth to age 5. Social learning processes (using the senses, experimenting, imitating, and playing) are described. Techniques for parents to help their children learn about themselves and others include building a sense of security and trust, being aware of the child's limitations, and encouraging friendships with other children. Ideas and activities are presented for creating a positive home learning environment. Specific suggestions are provided for socialization techniques with children who have communication problems, physical disabilities, and developmental delay. Examples of two young children are cited to illustrate ways in which parents can enhance their children's social skills. (CL)

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PARENT HELPER

HANDICAPPED CHILDREN BIRTH TO FIVE

SOCIALIZATION

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Parent Helper

Handicapped Children Birth to Five

SOCIALIZATION

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1982

SOURCE:

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INTRODUCTION

Parents are the most important adults in a child's life. The *Parent Helper, Handicapped Children Birth To Five: Socialization* is one in a series of booklets designed for parents. This booklet was developed to help you foster your child's social growth and self-esteem as you work with educators and other professionals that serve your child.

Social learning occurs through many developmental pathways. As your child's primary caregiver and teacher, you design the everyday situations for your child to explore his/her capabilities. How you feel about your child's progress will influence how your child feels about himself/herself. Your child needs to be praised, prodded, supported and enjoyed. He/she needs your persistence, reassurance and love to reach his/her potential. The approach described in the information that follows challenges you to take advantage of daily activities to encourage social development.

The intent of this *Parent Helper* is to provide general concepts of social growth and development, to present information on how the child learns about himself/herself and others, and to suggest activities that can be used as opportunities for learning and practicing social skills. While you may need to modify an activity to meet your child's needs, the guide will provide you with a sequence of developmental steps to follow.

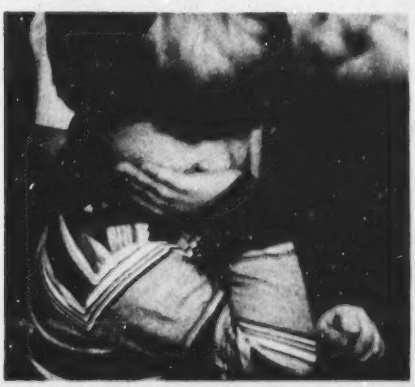
GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE... PATTERNS OF GROWTH

Many changes occur in the first five years of life. In the area of social development, the child gains self-awareness and learns ways of responding to others and ways of acting in different situations.

The child's self-concept is his/her sense of identity. It is molded as the child discovers who he/she is, what he/she can do, and how he/she is important to others. Making sure that this emerging self-concept is a positive one is of vital concern to parents and professionals. The child who feels good about himself/herself brings a "can do" attitude to learning experiences. A strong self-concept can help your child approach life's challenges and accept occasional setbacks.

Learning social skills is a developmental process with each skill building on the next. Your child's overall developmental level and particular handicapping condition are factors that influence social growth. You can help your child take part in social situations to the best of his/her ability and guide his/her efforts toward increasing independence and social maturity. While there is a great deal of difference in the rate that children progress, developmental norms do give a sequence for developmental expectations. The sequence enables the person working with a special child to begin where the child is developmentally and to pattern the learning of new skills in a more predictable manner.

The following Developmental Milestones Chart provides a reference for the approximate ages various social skills emerge.



DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

About 0-3 Months

Enjoys being tickled and fondled
Smiles spontaneously
Smiles in response to a smile, voice, or touch
Expresses pleasure with physical activity
Quiets when picked up
Maintains brief eye contact during feeding

About 3-6 Months

Laughs aloud often
Notices strangers
Voices pleasure or displeasure
Approaches image in a mirror
Cries when left alone or put down
Likes physical play
Shows awareness of strange environments

About 6-9 Months

Plays peek-a-boo
Expresses pleasure when playfully handled
Reacts playfully to mirror image
Plays unattended for short periods of time
Understands and adapts to social signals (smile, harsh tone)
Shows displeasure when familiar toy is removed

About 9-12 Months

Laughs aloud in play with adult
Responds appropriately to adult's change of mood
Temporarily responds to "no"
Shows preference for one toy over another

About 12-18 Months

Repeats a performance laughed at
Exhibits specific emotional behaviors such as fear, joy, and anger
Gives affection—returns a kiss or hug
Makes some decisions for self

About 18-24 Months

Cries or fusses for short period when parents are absent
Plays alone for extended period of time
Enjoys accompanying adult on short walks
Shows intense positive and negative reactions
Becomes easily frustrated
Shows pride in actions
Pays attention to other children

About 24-36 Months

Varies mood in response to reactions of others
Plays or works on own project when near other children
Initiates own play activities, plays in simple games
Indulges in pretend or make-believe play
Requests that specific stories be read
Avoids hazardous situations
Attempts to take turns

About 36-48 Months

Initiates play in group and remains to play
Shares toys upon suggestion
Performs simple errands
Plays cooperatively with other children
Consciously identifies with parents
Shows sympathy and concern when appropriate
Enjoys helping and participating

About 48-60 Months

Calls attention to own performance
Uses social response (e.g., please, thank you, raises hand, stands in line)
Chooses another child to play with
Talks about family
Prefers to be with peers rather than adults
Controls emotions and expresses them in acceptable ways

About 60+ Months

Comforts playmate in distress
Plans and builds constructively
Understands need for rules and fair play
Relates clock time to daily schedule

SOCIAL LEARNING . . . THE DISCOVERY PROCESS

How does your child learn about himself/herself and others?

- **BY USING THE SENSES.** Early experiences with seeing, hearing, touching, moving and tasting build self-awareness and spark interest in others. Parents and siblings are the most exciting "others" to the young child. As the family provides loving care and stimulating experiences, the child begins to develop his/her sense of self.
- **BY EXPERIMENTING.** The child explores his/her social world by trying out new behaviors. The effects that these behaviors have on others — how you respond — will help shape the direction that your child will take. Children usually increase social behaviors that are rewarded by positive attention.
- **BY IMITATING.** The child observes the actions of others and imitates those actions thus acquiring new skills. Repeating those actions eventually leads to using them in functional situations. Tried-and-true baby games like peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake are often a first means of teaching imitation. As the child develops, he/she is usually eager to imitate the "big kid" ways of older brothers and sisters or other children.
- **BY PLAYING.** Children gradually learn the give and take of group play. Enjoying playing near other children comes before the ability to play cooperatively with others. As play skills progress, the child can practice many social roles and act out many social situations within the security of make-believe play.

SOCIAL LEARNING . . . THE DISCOVERY PROCESS

What can you do to help your child learn about himself/herself and reach out to others?

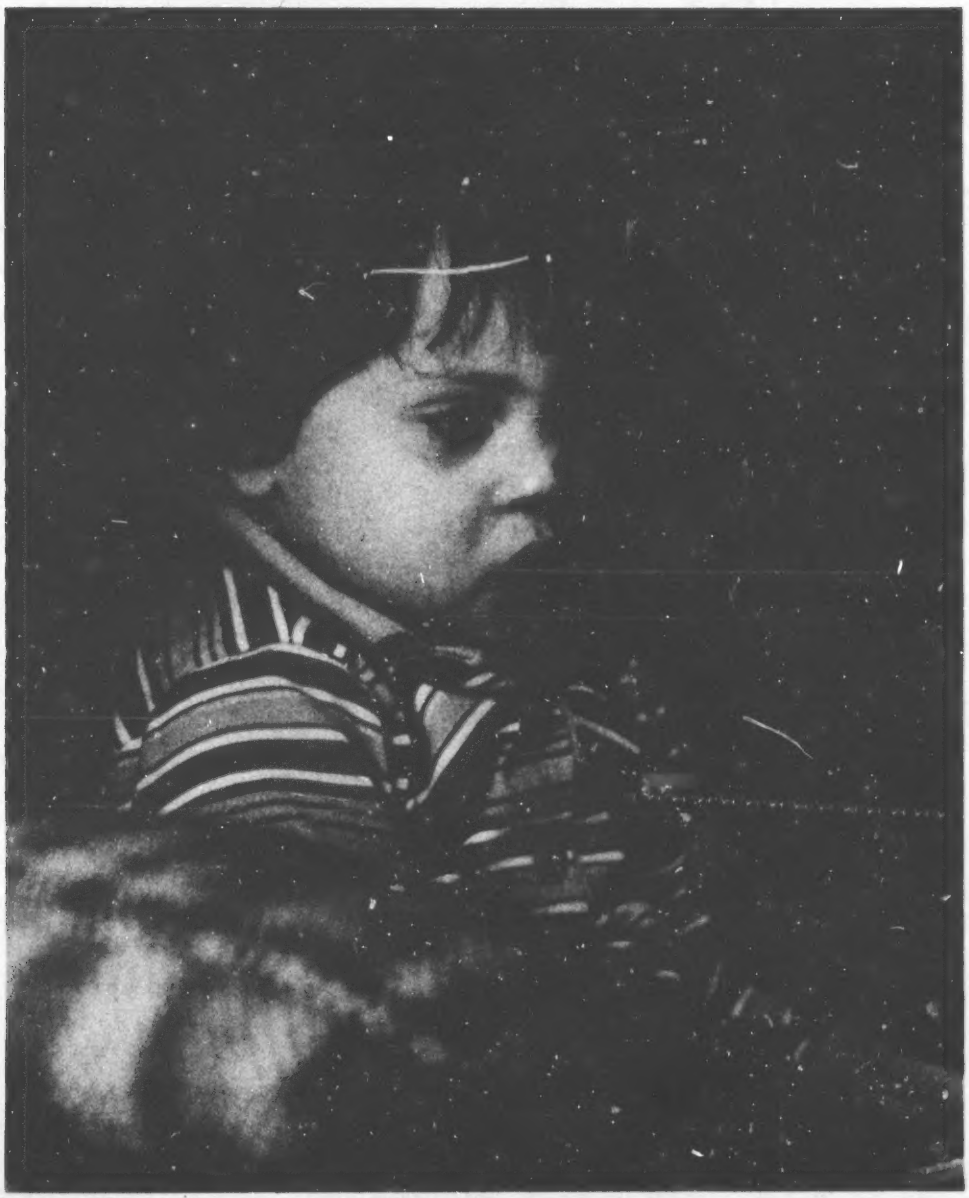
- **BUILD A SENSE OF SECURITY AND TRUST.** Given a loving and responsive home environment, your child will be able to establish a sense of self apart from the people and things about him/her. Patience, consistency and loving discipline are acts of caring which support your child as he/she strives toward independence.
- **BE SENSITIVE TO YOUR CHILD'S SIGNALS.** As an individual, your child shows unique ways of responding to new people and new experiences. Although he/she may not be able to put his/her feelings into words, he/she may need your reassurance when entering into unknown territory. Sometimes fearfulness and negative behaviors are signs that your child is not quite ready for the challenge at hand.
- **MAKE YOUR CHILD AN EQUAL IN THE FAMILY.** Although your handicapped child may present very special needs, his/her brothers and sisters also have a right to parent attention. Membership in a family involves learning to share: sharing time, sharing material resources, sharing one another's love. As your child grows more capable, he/she should be given the opportunity to perform tasks which contribute to the functioning of the family. Your child also needs to be shown ways to express how much he/she cares about the people that he/she loves.
- **BE AWARE OF YOUR CHILD'S LIMITATIONS.** Realize that your child's present social capabilities are largely determined by his/her overall developmental level. If he/she is four years old, yet developmentally functioning as a two year old, then your expectations of his/her social behavior should be based on developmental age, not chronological age.
- **GO FROM THE KNOWN TO THE UNKNOWN.** Prepare your child for new experiences by linking the familiar to the unknown. If your child has met the librarian and visited the children's room in the neighborhood library many times, then participating in preschool story hour is not so scary a prospect.

- **ENCOURAGE FRIENDSHIP WITH OTHER CHILDREN.** As children develop, they need the companionship of other little people. Follow your child's preference in selecting friends and provide opportunities for frequent play experiences at home and in the neighborhood. Being accepted and liked by other children becomes increasingly important as children develop. Learning to survive squabbles, hurt feelings, and changing affections is part of the normal but sometimes painful process of making friends.
- **PRAISE, PRAISE, PRAISE.** Set up the social situation for the child to be successful and show your pleasure through hugs, smiles and perhaps special treats. Step in to help if your child is frustrated and on the brink of failure. Reward him/her with plenty of praise for accomplishing what he/she could and having the courage to attempt the rest.

HOME . . . THE CHILD'S FIRST SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

From the very beginning, your child has an important place within your family. By being responsive to your child's needs for comfort, play and love, you build a foundation for interactive social relationships. The drive for independence emerges as developmental skills grow. As your child tries to do more and more for himself/herself, he/she continues to depend on you for guidance and support. Parent delight in the small accomplishments of a child can set expectations for larger successes.

The following ideas and activities are suggestions for ways you can create a positive home learning environment. You should, however, talk to your child's teacher and therapists to make sure that these are appropriate.



WHEN YOUR CHILD IS AN INFANT . . .

Respond to Comfort Needs	Crying is your infant's only means of communicating that something is wrong. Responding to your baby's cries promptly and consistently will not "spoil" him/her. However, seek help from professionals if your child's crying is frequent or persistent. Your child's pediatrician and therapists may be able to suggest ways of holding, walking, or rocking to soothe an unhappy baby.
Respond to People Contact Needs	Infants, like bigger people, get bored and lonely. Get into the habit of taking your baby with you as you move about the house. Let him/her see you, touch you and hear you.
Initiate Play	Sometimes handicapped babies seem content with routine care: feeding, burping, bathing, changing diapers. Although your baby may not seem to want additional attention, he/she needs you to make the first step towards play. Cuddle, squeeze, rub, kiss, sing to, and talk to your quiet child. Look for small changes in your baby's behavior that may be his/her way of responding to you. Try to hold and position your baby so that he/she can see your face and you can see his/hers.
Introduce Him/Her to Relatives and Friends	Family and friends are an important part of your life. Explain your infant's problems and accept offers of help and support. Allowing others to get to know your child will enrich his/her circle of special people. Keeping up your social life will renew your energy to help your child with his/her social learning.

AS YOUR CHILD EXPLORES THE WORLD . . .

Encourage Investigation	Being able to find out about things for themselves is exciting work for little people. Foster exploration in a safe environment. Make sure that drawers that are within reach can be safely explored. Designate one or two drawers as your toddler's own and vary the contents frequently. Try not to restrict your little adventurer to a playpen for long periods of time.
Support Decision Making	As your child begins to signal definite opinions about his/her world, you can help him/her to practice making appropriate decisions. Whenever possible, offer two acceptable choices and let your child make the decision; e.g., "Do you want cereal or eggs this morning?" or "Do you want to wear your Spiderman shirt or your soccer shirt to school?"
Respect Ownership	Gaining a sense of "mine" marks a developmental step in self-awareness. As your child shows a preference for certain toys or "loveys" like a blanket or stuffed toy, make sure that he/she has ready access to these favorites. Talk about things and people in terms of what is the child's and what belongs to others (e.g., his/her shoes, his/her brother's shoes). Your child may also appreciate a special place within the home to use as his/her quiet play area and a secure space for treasured possessions.
Booster Attempts to "Do It Myself"	Some children are eager for new tasks and experiences. Others need to be coaxed and encouraged. Regardless of how your child approaches challenges, success will be important for the development of self concept. Direct your child toward challenges that he/she is developmentally ready for. Break down big tasks into smaller parts; e.g., if your child wants to make a garden, break down the project into easy steps — digging, making holes, dropping seeds, covering them up, watering. Show him/her each step, but let your child do it for himself/herself.

Be Prepared for Stormy Weather

Anger, conflict, negativism, and temper tantrums are normal expressions of young children as they become more self-directed. Patience, loving discipline, and consistency are parent skills that help guide children through tumultuous times. Let your child know that it is what he/she has done, not him/her that you dislike; e.g., "I don't like that screaming" as compared to "You are bad." As your child directs anger at you, it may help to vocalize his/her feelings; e.g., "I know you're mad because Mommy dumped the water out of your pool, but it's dinner time now, not pool time." Let your child know that getting angry is understandable but that certain ways of showing anger, such as biting and kicking, are not acceptable. Show him/her that these behaviors will result in a predictable consequence, such as being sent to one's room.

Expect Play Skills to Come Gradually

Watching others, entering into play, taking turns, being a follower and a leader are social behaviors that result from teaching, experience and developmental readiness. Parents and siblings are ideal teachers of these skills. They provide role models and reward and shape the child's social responses.

Talk to Your Child About Feelings

Because you know your child best of all, you can help him/her identify feelings and put those feelings into words. Try to see the world through the eyes of your child and at the same time, try to show him/her that others have feelings too; e.g., "How would you feel if Sheila messed up your new doll?", or "I bet you're sad because Daddy can't put you to bed tonight. I think he misses you too.", or "Don't you feel proud that you came up those stairs all by yourself?"

Practice Social Situations and Manners

Knowing "how to act" in different social situations is not easy for young children. By giving your child clear guidelines for good behavior, rewarding his/her efforts, and giving him/her opportunities to practice, he/she will learn patterns of acceptable social skills. For example, practicing a quiet voice or whisper in make-believe play will prepare your child for appropriate quiet manners in the library. Acting out the giving of presents can be a rehearsal for a first away from home birthday party. Model and teach good manners. Your child will learn from a wide variety of ordinary social experiences: going shopping, eating at restaurants, playing in the parks, visiting friends and relatives. Don't expect your child's social behavior to be 100 percent perfect. All children have lapses into less mature behavior, especially when they are tired, frustrated, or in strange situations. Don't let the occasional embarrassment of a loud temper tantrum in a crowded shopping mall discourage you. Try to evaluate your child's behavior objectively, noting the successes as well as the problems.

Take Advantage of Community Resources

Participating in community activities for preschoolers is one way of your child having fun while gaining social experience with peers. Many communities offer a variety of activities designed to build social skills among the pre-school set, such as:

Preschool story hour at the library

Water play and swimming lessons

Children's films

Holiday parades

Holiday parties

Halloween parties

Supervised play at "tot lots"

Dance classes

Children's exhibits at museums

Special events at shopping malls

Community fairs at neighborhood schools

Don't assume that your child can't participate in events because of his/her handicap. Professionals providing child-oriented activities usually welcome special needs children. If you make them aware of your child's abilities and limitations, they can assist him/her in taking part to the best of his/her abilities.

Encourage Friendships

Having friends is an important part of growing up. Your child's potential friends may be neighborhood children, classmates, or children of your friends.

His/her playmates may span several years in age. Playing with more advanced children may stretch your child's abilities and provide models of more grown-up behavior.

Playing with younger children or less advanced children can give your child a chance to "shine" by taking the lead in initiating and directing play.

If your child is in preschool, he/she may have certain children that he/she chooses as special school friends. Inviting schoolmates to play at your house can be a nice way of supporting your child's friendships.

In the neighborhood, your attitude about your child's abilities and clear explanation of his/her disability may break down other parents' hesitancy about your child playing with their child. Usually, parents are concerned that their child will accidentally hurt the handicapped child; e.g., "Lin can go all over the house with her new braces. She does fall down sometimes, but takes it in stride. She does need an adult hand to help with stairs."

Taking the first step to invite children to play in your home or yard may be a way to build new friendships.

As your child progresses in playing with other children, he/she will welcome the freedom to make his/her own play by choosing materials, setting rules, selecting roles, and settling disputes.

CHECK THE DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES CHART FREQUENTLY TO DETERMINE THE LEVEL AT WHICH YOUR CHILD IS FUNCTIONING.

IF YOUR CHILD HAS A COMMUNICATION PROBLEM . . .

YOU MAY . . .

Expressing thoughts and feelings may be difficult.

- Have your child's hearing tested to make sure that he/she is hearing what is said. Speech is learned through modeling what is heard.
- Try to stop, look, and listen to show that what he/she communicates is important to you.
- Model short descriptive phrases that reflect what he/she is trying to say.
- Interpret his/her speech with others only when really necessary.
- Praise and encourage your child's use of whatever communication abilities he/she has in his/her activities with adults and children.

Asking questions may be frustrating.

- Encourage your child to repeat the question, tell you another way, or show you through actions, if possible. Respond to questions that he/she asks with facial expressions as well as to those that are spoken. Answer your child's questions with words that are at his/her understanding level and check his/her response to make sure that you satisfied the need for information.

Understanding what others are saying may be confusing.

- When necessary, rephrase what others say to him/her in words that are easier to understand.
- Be a model for others, explaining that your child understands best if they use short sentences.
- Show him/her with actions as well as with words. Using facial expressions, gestures, and acting out the motions may make the message that you are sending much clearer.

YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER AND SPEECH/LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST MAY HAVE MANY SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOUR CHILD. GET TO KNOW THEM.

IF YOUR CHILD HAS A PHYSICAL DISABILITY . . .

YOU MAY . . .

Playing with others may present challenges.

- Modify the home environment for play. Your own inventiveness and help from your child's therapists and teachers can result in play areas that accommodate your child's special needs. For example, a supportive seat built into your sandbox corner could give your non-sitting child one means of participating in outdoor play with neighborhood preschoolers.
- A one-story doll house that is built without a roof might be enjoyed by a child positioned over a wedge or on a prone board.
- Outfit your child with a basket or satchel attached to his/her wheelchair or crutches so he/she can transport toys and objects independently.
- Children will be naturally curious about your child's condition, especially if he/she uses special equipment or has obvious movement problems. Explain or, even better, let your child explain his/her disability to them in simple terms. Encourage your child's playmates to investigate how his/her braces, crutches, or wheelchair work. Let them try on his/her protective helmet.

Opportunities for independent activities may require time and planning.

- Set aside some time during the day or week to help your child practice skills that build independence. As your child matures, he/she needs the satisfaction of doing things for himself/herself, including doing real "big kid" jobs. He/she may be able to learn to:

  Load and unload the dryer

  Sort silverware from the dishwasher

  Pick up and place clothes in the hamper

  Pick up his/her own toys and place them on shelves or boxes within his/her reach

  Feed the dog or cat

  Help to wash the car

  Be an assistant cook in lots of simple cooking activities

PHYSICAL AND OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS HAVE SPECIAL TRAINING IN MODIFYING EQUIPMENT TO MEET THE NEEDS OF HANDICAPPED CHILDREN. SOMETIMES A HOME VISIT MADE BY A THERAPIST CAN HELP YOU TO COME UP WITH SOLUTIONS FOR PROVIDING PLAY AREAS WITHIN YOUR HOME.

IF YOUR CHILD IS DEVELOPING AT A VERY SLOW RATE...

Learning new social skills may be a very slow process requiring time, patience, and practice.

YOU MAY...

- Help by providing social stimulation at a level that matches his/her abilities.
- Show attention and loving persistence when playing with him/her. Learning to respond to others is an important first step in developing social skills. When he/she shows some awareness of other children, encourage this interest by providing many opportunities for him/her to be near other children. Show children how to talk and play with your child.
- Reinforce his/her attempts to imitate, no matter how imperfect. Praise, affection, and other rewards may motivate him/her to continue his/her efforts. Learning to imitate is a skill that can help build many new abilities in the future.
- Break down new tasks into very small, simple parts. This may lead to slow but steady learning.

YOUR CHILD'S TEACHERS AND THERAPISTS ARE GOOD RESOURCES FOR IDEAS AND TECHNIQUES TO HELP YOU HELP YOUR CHILD. SHARE YOUR IDEAS AND YOUR PROBLEMS WITH THEM.

SAMPLE EXERCISES

Occasions, such as mealtime, weekly shopping trips, and social outings can become learning experiences for your handicapped child and make the child feel a real part of the family routine. The following exercises illustrate how everyday situations can be used as learning experiences.

DESCRIPTION:

Debbie was just a toddler a year ago when she had a serious illness that resulted in brain damage. All of the developmental skills learned so easily in her first year were lost. She was functioning like an infant. Yet unlike most infants, she was very passive. Debbie was "too good," crying only if she was hungry and content to lie quietly when she was awake.

TEACHING EXERCISE:

Debbie's parents, working with her doctors and infant specialist, recognized that she needed a great deal of loving stimulation to begin to respond to people once again.

Her Mother noticed that Debbie seemed most alert about halfway through a feeding, when she wasn't terribly hungry anymore but not yet tired. She experimented with a routine of a few minutes of special smiling, stroking, talking, and singing. Each time she looked carefully at Debbie's responses. She was encouraged to note signs that Debbie was attending more to her. Debbie was looking at her more intently and for longer periods, and she seemed to relax more when she was being held.

Her Mother added a similar special play break each time she changed her diapers. The changing table was ideal for face to face contact and the act of getting dry pants invited stroking and cuddling.

Her Dad was determined to keep Debbie in the mainstream of family activities. Because she was too large for a regular sized infant seat, he worked with her therapist to adapt her highchair and car seat so that she could see from a semi-reclined position. He made it a practice to take Debbie with him as he watched television, cleaned up after meals, or did other jobs around the house. Debbie began to follow him with her eyes and seemed to show a hint of a smile when he came back into view.

Debbie's rate of progress was very slow and a full year passed before she regained the sparkle in her eyes and rewarded her parents with smiles. Yet her progress was steady and probably resulted from their patient efforts to help her respond to them.

DESCRIPTION:

Four year old Elliot is a member of a busy family. On weekday mornings the family needs to perform with the precision of a drill team to get Mother, Dad, Elliot, and the baby ready by 8:30 sharp. Although Elliot is cooperative and capable of doing things for himself at other times, his morning behavior is his absolute worst. He often has temper tantrums over what he is to wear or what he has to eat—sometimes for no apparent reason at all. Often he is not ready for the school bus so his Mother or Dad has to drive him to school, making themselves late for work.

TEACHING EXERCISE:

Elliot's parents realized that his "bad" behavior in the morning was making him the center of attention during a time that being good did not result in anything very special happening. Once Elliot was in the car on the way to school, he was his normal, pleasant self and seemed to enjoy seeing his parents talk to his teacher for a few moments and say hello to his friends.

To change this pattern, his parents set up a new routine that built in special rewards for Elliot's good behavior.

Elliot's parents took turns getting him up twenty minutes earlier in the morning. As a reward for cooperative behavior in dressing, including doing some of it himself, Elliot got to choose the breakfast menu and spend some time with his parents making pancakes, mixing juice, or pouring cereal. His parents also recorded his good behavior on a chart which he carried in his lunch box to school. His teacher looked for it as soon as he arrived and praised him for being such a big helper at home.

Many of the suggestions in this guide have come from parents of handicapped children; others have been successfully used by teachers and other school personnel. It is hoped that the suggested activities will assist you in creating a secure, loving environment which will encourage and nurture your child's self-esteem and social growth.

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